FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE

NEWSLETTER

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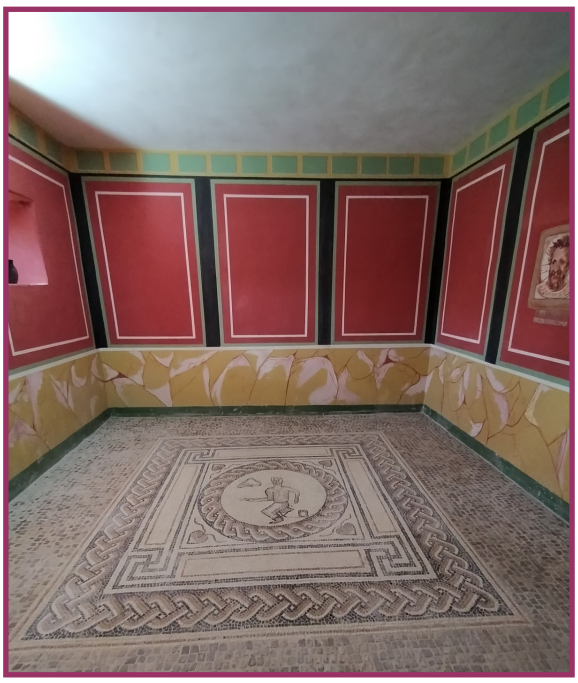
More than Meets the Eye: Sounds, Smells and Space at Fishbourne Roman Palace

Archaeology is typically a visual discipline: it relies on sight for survey, excavation, interpretation and reconstruction. Yet vision offers only a fraction of information about the experiences of ancient communities. When one holds a metal cup, it is not just seen. It is felt - for example its texture and weight. It is smelt - for example the material from which it is made and its contents.

The same is true of architecture. When you occupy a room you don't just see it. You smell it, feel its temperature, and hear noises from within and outside. These sensations dictate how you experience and use a space often more than its visual appearance. Warm rooms are better suited for entertaining, whilst cool rooms work best for food storage. Considering all of the senses provides new ways to explore archaeological sites/ruins. It opens up new ways of addressing questions about a variety of lived experiences that until now were unanswerable.

This is why we have recently been working with Dr Hannah Platts from Royal Holloway (University of London) and Therese Kearns from Butser Ancient Farm to develop a project that will examine the Palace through a multisensory lens. Hannah's expertise in this type of work is unrivalled and she hopes to use this to revisit the original interpretation of the site and ask questions about what it was like to live or work at the Palace, rather than just what the building looked like. For example, construction materials enable insight into the building's temperature and acoustic properties, whilst floral and faunal remains inform us about smells and taste.

A further multisensory exploration of how the building changed through time (as we know it did) will help us understand these changes better. As rooms were subdivided throughout the 2nd and subsequent centuries, what was the impact on the sounds and smells of those rooms, and can this help us understand why these changes occurred or what new activities were taking place in them?



Reconstruction of Roman room at Butser Ancient Farm

Photo: Anne de Potier

By using the reconstructed Sparsholt villa at Butser Ancient farm as a "multisensory lab", we will be able to develop and test ideas and apply the learning from this to the Palace itself. The Sparsholt reconstruction, for example, has a working hypocaust that can be used to model potential temperature changes when it is in use. This should help us understand the impact of installation of similar systems at Fishbourne and what new or different activities in the heated rooms were enabled.

This is a hugely ambitious project and we hope it will form the focus of a PhD. We are in the process of applying for funding for this work. Nothing is guaranteed, but if our funding application is successful, the PhD is due to start in October 2026.

Rob Symmons

The Lepers on the Hill

How can red squirrels on Brownsea Island be connected to a medieval leper hospital outside Winchester? In her talk 'The Lepers on the Hill', given to the Friends in July, osteoarchaeologist Lesley Johnson set out to describe her work on some of the skeletons excavated from St Mary Magdalen Hospital, and in so doing she explained this connection. [Work on the site was started in 2000 by Time Team, then the University of Winchester began a project in 2007, led by Dr Simon Roffey and Dr Phil Marter.]

Lesley started by defining leprosy, stating that there are four strains, and the disease can occur in mild and more severe forms. It is a bacterial infection, which today is known as Hansen's Disease. It is transmitted through nasal secretions, but is not lethal. However, as it can affect the nose, mouth (including teeth), limbs, hands and feet it can lead to many other problems. It is no longer endemic in Britain, but still exists in parts of Africa and Asia. Today it is curable by multi -drug therapy.

Winchester leper hospital

Detecting leprosy in skeletons involves several techniques, starting with observation of appearance. Parts of the nose and jaw may be missing. Teeth may be deformed or show signs of calculus. Fingers and toes may be deformed or missing. Hands can show a claw shape. Limbs may have discoloured patches. Further study is now possible using scientific techniques such as ancient DNA analysis. (Readers may know that there was a medieval leper hospital at Westhampnett, east of Chichester. It was excavated in the 1980s and 1990's, when this technique was not available.)

Not all the skeletons excavated showed signs of leprosy. The proportion in the older part was higher than in the later southern part, indicating that the hospital's purpose became more general. These hospitals could provide medical care in the form of herbs, but they mainly offered shelter, food clothing and spiritual care.

Lesley described some case studies. The first was buried in a carefully prepared grave with a head niche. He was of average height, and between 18 and 25 years old. A scallop shell of a species found off Santago was also in the grave, indicating that the man had been a pilgrim. His skull was of a shape suggesting a southern European or north African heritage. DNA analysis showed he had many more symptoms of leprosy than had been visible. Isotopic analysis showed he had enjoyed a diet rich in meat and marine protein, and that he had lived in southern England but not in a chalk area, so not local to Winchester.

Skeleton 19 suffered from an extreme form of leprosy, and his left foot had been amputated. He had no top jaw or hard palate. He had been buried in a shroud, with pottery vessels in his grave, which Lesley suggested might have been specially made for him so he could live with his deformities.

Skeleton 56 was that of a child aged from 10 – 16. It had not been possible to discover its sex. They showed arrested development associated with getting leprosy early in life. The DNA showed their young childhood has been spent somewhere north-east of the British Isles. She wondered where and why.

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And now the squirrels: today the nearest Red Squirrels are on Brownsea Island, and leprosy has been found amongst that population. Comparative testing of the medieval human and squirrel bones from Winchester has shown they had the same strain (and it is different from that in modern squirrels). Winchester had a flourishing fur industry, and squirrels were imported from the Baltic. So the child could have been connected to this international trade. The question now arises of how this cross-species infection happened.

Lesley's talk was clear and engaging and I found it fascinating. There was a good attendance, and an interesting variety of questions at the end. Lesley fielded all these, adding further detail to an excellent presentation.

Anne de Potier

PS in case you are interested, the squirrel research is featured in the August 2024 edition of *Current Archaeology*. The original paper from *Current Biology* (Volume 34, Issue 10, 20 May 2024, Pages 2221-2230) is online at https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982224004469

Publications about the Winchester dig can be traced online. The directors were Dr Simon Roffey and Dr Phil Marter. The project website is

https://www.winchester.ac.uk/research/Our-impactful-research/Research-in-Humanities-and-Social-Sciences/Research-projects/MHARP/

The Chichester dig was published as *Lepers outside the gate* by John Magilton *et al*, CBA Research Report 158 (2008) downloadable from Archaeology Data Service

Excavation at Graylingwell Hospital 1998

I continue to work on the reboxing project for the Novium Museum. Once in a while, I open a box and find something with a WOW! factor. Graylingwell Hospital, Chichester was originally the West Sussex County Asylum opened in 1897 and finally closed in 2022. It was dug prior to work to provide additional beds in 1998. One box contained not one, but two almost intact small pots.

The first one is an indented New Forest ware small bottle or vial. Apart from the opening looking slightly abraded, it is intact.

The second pot is Nene Valley ware with lovely decoration. A large piece remains intact and sherds from the broken part were also found.

Mary Haskins

Found in a drawer

When my stepdaughter's Grandmother died, aged 102, Lucy found this flint point in a drawer when she was clearing the house. Knowing our interest in "old" things, she gave it to us. Over the years it has been on display on a chest amongst our collection of interesting things.

On our travels we have seen a number of similar flint points in museums in Europe and North Africa and decided to try to find out more. Googling produced many similar images but apart from references to grey/green flints found in mountains in France and Austria we were none the wiser.

We decided to ask Rob for his opinion and David Bone happened to be there. They both agreed it was flint, not English and quite old and suggested we contact the British Museum.

Imagine our amazement when just a day after sending this photo of the flint to a generic British Museum email address, we received a reply from the Keeper of Britain, Europe and Prehistory, Jill Cook, herself, saying she would love to see it and could we bring it in to the Museum.

British Rail intervened and it was not until the middle of June that we finally met Jill Cook to show her our carefully wrapped "inheritance".

We explained all we knew about the "provenance" of our flint, including the fact that Lucy's Grandfather had lived in British Honduras (now Belize) and wondered if it might have originated in Central/South America.

Jill Cook quickly disabused us of this fanciful notion and explained that its origins were closer to home. She said she had wondered, when she saw the photos, if it was one of a known hoard of flints points dating from 18,000 BC, the whereabout of some were still unknown. It wasn't. We felt so sorry to have raised her expectations.

However, she was very complimentary about our flint. She said it was Neolithic (8000 years old), probably made in the Normandy or Brittany areas of what is now France by the earliest settled farming communities. It was made from grey Chert in a Laurel leaf shape. As it was never used and is beautifully crafted, Jill suggested it was possibly a ceremonial offering.

We feel very fortunate to be custodians of a small piece of ancient history.

Heather and Tony Smith

(who say 'We realise this has nothing to do with the Romans, but as Fishbourne has nurtured our interest in all things ancient, it feels appropriate to share it.' I agree – Ed.)

Report from the Chair, October 2024

In June this year, we were approached by SAS to pledge £2,500 towards a £25,000 fundraising campaign aimed to support urgent repairs at the different SAS properties. I asked whether members were happy to support this, and it was a definite 'yes' although a few members did register disagreement for specific reasons that were duly noted. SAS have recently announced that "This campaign was enabled by the incredible support and generosity of our wonderful Friends groups and Trustees. To date, and with a few days still to go, we have raised a total of £20,139; equating to 80% of our £25,000 target and we would like to say thank you for everyone's incredible generosity".

Since my last report in June earlier this year, we had a successful talk in July on 'Lepers on the Hill' by osteoarchaeologist, Lesley Johnson. Unfortunately, I was away but thanks to all those who helped and attended. I was persuaded to give the October talk, which was 'Discovering Lavant Stone; the search for an unknown medieval and Roman building stone in the Chichester district'. *(See report page 7.)* It was about a step back into my early days of historic building stone studies, which led to the recognition of a previously unknown local building stone that was widely used in Chichester Cathedral and extensively in medieval buildings in the area.

In early September, the Palace and the Friends jointly hosted a visit by the Chairs of the other SAS properties (and some of their colleagues): Michelham Priory. the Priests House, Anne of Cleeves House and Marlipins. This is part of an ongoing process to improve links between SAS and the respective Friends Groups. We stated with a tour of the Palace guided by Penny Horsfield, then the Conservation Laboratory with Jacqui Watson, followed by the storage facilities with Rob Symmons. We finished with refreshments served by the Palace staff and had the opportunity to meet SAS Trustees who were arriving for an evening meeting. A very successful event and particular thanks to Richard New and Penny Horsfield for putting together the finishing touches.

In my last report, I brought to your attention the need for a volunteer to help arrange the talks programme. There has been a deathly silence in response and the future of the talks programme continuing after the AGM in Spring 2025 is at risk. *I ask again, can you help?*

I also want to give you advance notice that I will be stepping down from the post of Chair and also coming off the committee at the Spring 2025 AGM. I will then have served 3.5 years of the 4 years allowed under the Constitution (the AGM of my appointment having been delayed 6 months by the pandemic). In addition, I need to reduce my existing workload as I have been asked to take on the role of volunteer consultant building stone geologist with English Heritage for SE England from October this year. The Friends will therefore need a new Chair. Richard New (our Treasurer) has offered to take on the role (subject to membership approval). If so, we will need a new Treasurer!

Relevant papers for discussion and voting will be circulated prior to the AGM but advance offers to assist with the talks programme or take on the role of Chair or Treasurer would be much appreciated.

David Bone

Funding crises

We are sorry to hear that Fareham's Westbury Manor Museum, formerly run by Hampshire Cultural Trust, has closed. We fear that funding issues elsewhere may lead to further closures. We are also mindful of the difficulties still facing Sussex Archaeological Society. David, our Chairman, has written of this above. Some money from the Sussex Guardians Appeal has already been allocated to Fishbourne, but the appeal is still open.

Anne de Potier, Editor

The Palace's Learning Team has won the prestigious Sandford Award. This is given for heritage learning at historic sites. The work of the Fishbourne team was deemed to be 'first class'. Congratulations!

Thousands of schoolchildren come every year to discover the Palace and learn about different aspects of life there. Activities are also offered to families and home educators, so people of all ages can experience what day-to-day life could have been like at the Palace.

Photo from FRP

Lavant Stone; The discovery of a "new" medieval and Roman building stone

The talk, given by David Bone on 5th October 2024, took us back to the project that started his interest in historic building stones. This was in the early 1990s, when a study was being carried out on Chichester Cathedral to identify the stone types prior to conservation work. The consultants had identified a large amount of a coarse-grained phosphatic chalk with no known provenance but suspected to have come from outcrops of similar stone in Normandy, as with the more common Caen Stone.

It was by chance that the consultant archaeologist, Tim Tatton-Brown, dropped into Chichester Museum and saw a small exhibit of fossil sharks' teeth on display that came from a known early 20th C fossil-collecting site on the South Downs near the Chilgrove Valley. Tim recognised the teeth as being identical to those seen in the unknown stone in the Cathedral, strongly suggesting a source for the building stone in that area.

The task was given to David and Anne Bone to investigate, a project that took several years of in-depth study. David described how this unusual chalk with sharks' teeth was formed and why its outcrop was restricted to certain areas. We then heard about the search for its use in and around Chichester to confirm its local source and the date of its use to the 11th-13th C. This was principally in medieval churches and chapels, some of it ornately carved, but also included secular buildings such as Arundel Castle and Halnaker House. The distribution of its use was centred on a 10 mile radius from Chichester, this being the transport hub for the area.

Further studies including aerial photographs and historic documents confirmed the source of the stone and the medieval date of its quarrying. There was no evidence for later quarrying at the site. Calculations based on the recorded size of several hundred individual stone blocks and the estimated total volume of stone extracted also confirmed that the single source on the South Downs was enough to provide the stone seen at over 66 sites throughout Chichester and the surrounding area.

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Lavant stone used in the 12th century Chapter House at Boxgrove Priory

Photo: David Bone

So, what to call this "new" stone. The name Lavant Stone was chosen, this being the nearest place-name and less cumbersome than Chilgrove Valley Stone. But this was not the end of the story. Just prior to publication, David was shown a piece of Lavant Stone with attached Roman mortar. This initiated an urgent visit to Roman sites throughout the area as well as looking at stone samples in museum archives.

Crawling around the floors and walls at Fishbourne and Bignor revealed no new examples. However, pieces were seen in the walls of the cover buildings at Bignor, which were known to include reused pieces of Roman stone, and in archived stones from the Chilgrove Valley villa sites. This included a Roman stone column on gallery display in Chichester Museum (then in Little London), mis-labelled as sandstone but including a small shark's tooth to confirm it as Lavant Stone. So, the Romans had got there first.

The project successfully identified a previously unrecognised building stone used not only extensively in Chichester Cathedral and medieval buildings in the area, but also its use in Roman times. Lavant Stone is now a recognised historic building stone and is included on the databases of the British Geological Survey and English Heritage. How many other "unknown" building stones are out there waiting to be discovered?

References

Bone, D. A. and Bone, A. E. 2000. Lavant Stone: a late Roman and medieval building stone from the Chalk (Upper Cretaceous) of West Sussex. *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* 111, 193-203.

Bone, A. E. and Bone, D. A. 2004. Lavant Stone; a Roman and medieval building stone in West Sussex. *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 142, 63-78.

Bone, D. A. 2016. Historic building stones and their distribution in the churches and chapels of West Sussex, England. *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* 127, 153-77.

Do you remember the lavender bed? The Friends funded the planting of a lavender bed to improve what was then an untidy part of the gardens at the Palace. This is how it looked in 2018. The plants have since grown and thrived, and now, when the bushes have their annual haircut there is an abundant harvest of flowers. These have been made into fragrant bags, which have been on sale in the North Wing gift shop.

Sussex Archaeological Society

At the 19th October 2024 AGM of the Sussex Archaeological Society at Fishbourne, David Bone gave an introduction (abridged):

Many of our members were involved with excavations and early years of the Palace as a visitor attraction. The Friends are better considered patrons, rather than volunteers, and we have provided a valuable contribution to the operation of the Palace. We have always been somewhat separate from mainstream SAS activities. I am encouraged by the Chair's initiative of regular meetings between the Friends groups of the properties. SAS has, and is, facing many challenges; improved communications and networking is essential. Fishbourne competes well with international sites and deserves all the support we can give it. The Friends look forward to a promising future.

The business of the AGM reiterated the financial problems facing the Society, developed over several decades and still needing difficult decisions. There is hope that the coming year would see a more stable business model developing.

Remember - The Committee needs your help

As noted in the Chair's report, the Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace require the following if the organisation is to continue:

An organiser for the talks programme – as soon as possible

Chair – to be voted in at the Spring 2025 AGM

Treasurer – (if Richard New is voted in as Chair)

If you are willing to help or know someone who might, then please let the committee know, using the Friends' email address.

Save the date!

This is advance notice that the AGM in 2025 will be held on Saturday 12th April.

The AGM business will be followed by a talk on "Ice Age Archaeology: From Chichester to Arundel" by Dr Matt Pope of University College, London.

Don't miss it!

Editor: Anne de Potier

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